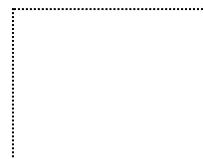


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ACHS NEWSLETTER

Volume 16 Issue 2

May 2020

PHOTO CONTEST DEADLINE EXTENDED UNTIL JUNE 30

Entries Can Be Submitted at Dairy Queen on Wednesdays

Inside this issue:

From the Lab	2
Membership Letter	2
Spanish Flu Epidemic	3
History News	4
Quarantine from the Past	4

ACHS Officers & Trustees

(year term expires)

Cheryl Livingston, President (2022)

Janie White, Treasurer (2022)

Debbie Machac, Secretary (2022)

Brad Brundrett (2023)

Ernest Camehl (2021)

Ty Husak (2023)

John Jackson (2023)

David Murrah (2022)

Pam Stranahan (2021)

Jeanie Schindler (2021)

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

David J. Murrah

After a two-month delay due to the pandemic, ACHS is now ready to begin collecting photographs for the Annual Historical Photo Contest.

If you are like most of us, you have spent some time cleaning out closets and drawers and we are guessing you have found some real treasures in photos.

We are seeking historic photos related to Aransas County history that are at least 25 years old. The three top entries will receive cash prizes of \$100 for first place, \$50, for second, and and \$25 for third. They will also be published in the 2021 Calendar and featured in a special exhibit. There is no entry fee.

The new deadline for submission is June 30.

Entries may be submitted at the Dairy Queen on Wednesdays from 2 to 3 pm, beginning May 27 and through the month of June.

You can also obtain an entry form at our website, achs1985.org, and send a signed scanned copy of your entry form along with a high resolution scan



This photo, submitted by Connie McWilliams for the 2019 contest, won first place and became the cover of the 2020 ACHS Calendar of Historical Photographs, which in turn made it one of our most popular calendars.

{minimum size of 300 PPI) of your entry via email to inquire@achs1985.org. Also, you can mail your entry to ACHS, Box 702, Rockport, TX 78381, and we will scan your photo and return it to you. Be sure to include a signed copy of the entry form with your mailing.

The annual Photo Contest has helped to greatly enhance ACHS's photo collection since its inception more than ten years ago.

There is no charge to enter the contest.

FROM THE LAB: A message from the President

As is often the case, we find inspiration and optimism even when our current times are challenging.

One thing that has expanded rapidly over the past two months is the vocabulary of life in a pandemic. There are at least 20 new terms and 5 of them showed up in the March 2020 Merriam-Webster dictionary. There is an evolving lexicon to COVID-19. I'm guessing we may soon see new slang terms and socially distant dance moves to fit these extraordinary circumstances.

It's possible to look ahead with optimism and act with caution at the same time. We look forward to two upcoming programs, The History of Fulton and the History of Schools in Rockport and Fulton. Stay tuned for dates, locations and other details as we have them. The presentation on the Art of the

Governor's Mansion is temporarily postponed. We look forward to co-hosting this event with the Art Center of Rockport.

Many thanks for those of you who have renewed your memberships. We appreciate the support and will put the funds to good use.

The yearly photo contest to select photos for the 2021 calendar is underway. Take a look at our website, ACHS1985.org for entry forms and the latest information on submitting photos for consideration. You can also bring your entries to the Dairy Queen on Wednesdays from 2-3 pm and we will scan them for you. If you have questions, please email me at clivings1@comcast.net.

Bear with us; like surviving Hurricane Harvey, we will get through this.

—Cheryl Livingston

Thanks to the Response to the March Membership Mailout

As acting ACHS Membership Committee Chair, I would like to thank everyone who responded to the 2020 membership renewal reminder mailed at the end of March. The response to that mailing – at a time while we are all social distancing – was impressive indeed. Because of you, we still have a strong membership, and it is really great to know that we can still depend on you to support our efforts to preserve Aransas County History. We are eagerly awaiting a chance to visit with you at a program very soon.

I will be handing our membership records over to a new membership Chairman very soon. We were just about to make that transfer when we all started staying home. This period has given me the chance

to make sure that all addresses and renewal dates are correct. I'm looking forward to handing a perfect database over to the new chairman. However, if you have any corrections, let us know.

Our previous Membership Committee Chair was Jean Schindler. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank her. As Treasurer, I get to work closely with the Membership Committee, and it has been a real pleasure to work with Jean. Let's hope, Jean, that we get to sit at the Dairy Queen really soon, and enjoy a treat while we visit.

Thank you all again! Stay Well!!

ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT by Ty Husak

Looking for something to do during this down time? Check out the ACHS website at ACHS1985.org and listen to the recorded oral history interviews, or watch some of the past presentations, or sing along with a Guy Clark song, or catch up on past newsletters. All of this is available to pursue at your leisure. Enjoy!

**A membership in the Aransas County
Historical Society makes a great gift!**

**Only \$20 for individual or \$30 for family.
Send recipient's name and address to us
along with a check, payable
to ACHS, and we will do the rest.
ACHS, BOX 702. ROCKPORT, TX 78381**

KEEPING TODAY'S NUMBERS IN PERSPECTIVE: THE 1918-19 FLU EPIDEMIC IN ARANSAS COUNTY

by

David Murrah, Ph.D.

When the threat of the current pandemic began, I recalled comments my father had made about the 1918-19 Spanish influenza epidemic and how it affected his immediate family when he was a ten-year-old growing up in western Oklahoma. All got sick, but, thankfully, all survived.

That pandemic was quite severe. As you probably know, the outbreak took 675,000 lives in the United States, and approximately 2,100 in Texas. At the time, the U.S population was about 106 million and Texas, 4.5 million.

What about the impact on Aransas County? A Texas historical marker at the Rockport Cemetery notes that “a large number of burials took place here in 1918, the year of a devastating influenza epidemic.” But how many deaths? For an answer, I reviewed recorded death certificates for the county from 1915 to 1922 to find out how many people died locally.

For 1918-19, Aransas County recorded 11 deaths attributed to influenza, and another 15 to pneumonia, some of which may have been caused by the flu. Aransas County at the time had a population of approximately 2,100 people. The combined loss of 26 to flu and pneumonia represented approximately 1¼ percent of the local population, whereas the national average was about half that, at approximately five-eighths of 1 percent. But, if you count only the 11 deaths specifically attributed to the flu, the Aransas County percent of one-half of 1 percent would be more comparable to the national average.

The first recorded influenza death during the two-year period was on October 18, 1918, a 46-year old ranch hand.

It is important to keep the numbers in perspective. For example, before the 1918 outbreak, Aransas County averaged about 16 deaths a year during the three year period of 1915-17. In the three years following the outbreak--1920 to 1922--the average fell to just 9 deaths a year. But, in between, the 1918 death rate spiked to 44 followed by 40 in 1919, nearly two and a half times more than the county annual average.

Let's take a closer look at those 84 deaths recorded in

1918 and 1919. Of the 44 deaths in 1918, 11 were attributed to pneumonia and 6 to flu. The remainder was by causes typical of the time, such as old age, measles, and still-born babies.

But 1919 was strikingly different. In that year, 40 died, with 4 deaths attributed to the flu and 5 to pneumonia. But 4

also died as a result of a disastrous fire at the Heldenfelds Shipyard, and another 8 drowned in the September hurricane. Thus, twice as many in Aransas County died from the hurricane than did the flu.

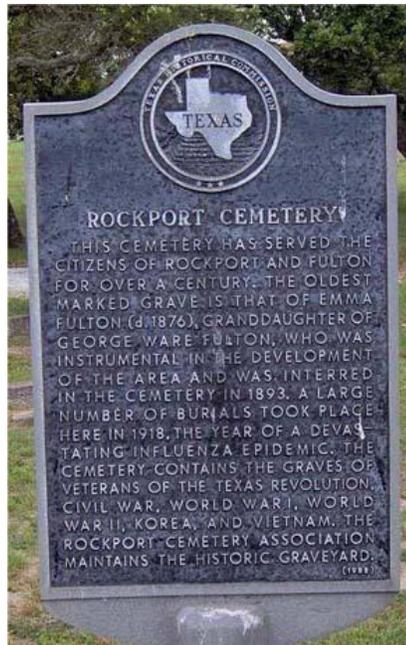
Without a doubt, the 1918-19 influenza epidemic helped to more than double the annual death rate in Aransas County, but the September storm of 1919 did its part by claiming at least 8 lives.

While it is way too early to compare the 1918-19 outbreak with the current pandemic, we can perhaps assess where we are locally compared to the rest of the nation. At the time I am writing this in mid-May of 2020, there have been approximately 90,000 deaths attributed to the coronavirus outbreak across the US, which represents only three hundredths of 1 percent of the national population of 331 million people. Today, if the death percentage matched that of the 1918-19 epidemic, then more than two million lives would be lost nationally.

And, here at home, even though we have a population ten times greater than we did in 1919, we are currently standing at no deaths as yet in the county at the time of this writing. If it were to match the percent of influenza deaths in Aransas County for 1918-19, the number of deaths today would be 122 just in our own county.

So, at this point in time, hurricanes like Harvey in 2017, which claimed two lives locally, remains the greater threat. As previously mentioned the September 1919 hurricane took twice as many lives as did the flu for that year. If another storm comes, at least we have the opportunity to get out of the way.

With the pandemic, we have been “out of the way” since its outbreak because we live in a rural county with shelter in place. But, with the community filling up with people pouring in from other places trying “to get out of the way” of the pandemic, we still need to be careful. Regardless, let's count it as a blessing that we live in Aransas County.



Texas State Historical Marker at the Rockport Cemetery which notes that “a large number of burials” occurred in 1918 due to the flu epidemic.

ACHS ANNUAL MEETING FEATURES PROGRAM ON ROCKPORT'S EARLIEST CHURCHES

The Annual Meeting of the Aransas County Historical Society drew a nice crowd to the Saltwater Pavilion on February 27. Attendees were treated to a major presentation on the history of Rockport's five earliest churches. The speakers and their topics were Kathryn Albin (Baptist), David Murrah (Methodist), Janie White (Episcopal), Fred Gibbs (Catholic), and John Jackson (Presbyterian).

At its annual business meeting, the Society also re-elected three trustees, Brad Brundrett, John Jackson, and Ty Husak to three-year terms.

The February meeting, normally for members only, was opened to the general public because of the program topic. Future program plans include the History of Fulton, and the History of Aransas County Schools, but dates have not been determined.



Church historian Fred Gibbs gave a great presentation on the history of the Catholic Church in Aransas County, including the origin of the Stella Maris Chapel. Photo from video by Ty Husak of Annual Meeting Presentation.



This picture of the first building of the Presbyterian Church of Rockport dates from the early 1900s. The building stood at Market St. and Magnolia, and served the congregation until 1949.

Rev. T. O. Perrin, pictured in the inset, was the church's first resident pastor.

John Jackson used this photo as a part of his presentation on the history of the church.

Photo courtesy First Presbyterian Church and John Jackson.

HISTORY CENTER PLANS MAY 30 REOPENING

The History Center for Aransas County will be open on Sat. May 30, 10-4 and Sun. May 31, 1-4 for you to have a *Last Chance* to view the "Hispanic Heritage in Aransas County." Visitors have enjoyed the posters about the 500-year history, the Canary Islanders including many local families, the stories related by the Spanish classes from RFHS, and many more. Videos on tablets relate oral histories and further details about the Hispanic community in Rockport-Fulton.

On Saturday, June 13, a new exhibit, entitled "Sails, Trails, Rails and Wings," will open at 10 a.m.

A guest speaker, Ken Stavinoha, station agent from Eagle Lake, will give a short talk outside before the exhibit opens.

The History Center at 801 E. Cedar St. is free to all visitors, and is open Friday thru Mondays.

IS QUARANTINE NEW TO THE COASTAL BEND? A History Mystery by Pam Stranahan

Editor's Note: This article appeared in a recent issue of the Rockport Pilot, and its author, ACHS Trustee Pam Stranahan, graciously allowed us to reprint it due to its timeliness to the present pandemic.

Is quarantine new to the Coastal Bend? Not at all. We had quarantine orders in the 1800s when yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox were terrible killers. In the 1800s ships were detained if they came from ports with yellow fever or cholera. Serious epidemics broke out in New Orleans, Galveston and Corpus Christi in 1867.

Hobart Huson describes the time: "The yellow fever broke out along the Texas coast in the summer of 1867. As it was believed that the dread disease had been brought into our section of the state by infected vessels from New Orleans, a quarantine was established for St. Mary's and Rockport. Colonel L.B. Camp was appointed health officer for Rockport and Dr. M.W. C. Frazier, health officer for St. Mary's. The health officers assembled necessary assistants. Captain Stephen Peters with his schooner, Paul Jones, was hired for quarantine inspection." They detained the ships that had a choice of waiting out a quarantine period or heading to other ports.

In June 1870 the Texas governor issued a proclamation quarantining the Gulf coast. In response to this continuing problem, U.S. Public Health Service was developed. An active quarantine effort began. The Mercer log (recorded by the family of pilots in Port Aransas) described a Dr. Ansel being

on duty in September 1875. In September of 1878 Frank Stephenson arrived from Corpus Christi with the announcement: strict quarantine – no more vessels allowed to go to Corpus Christi.

In 1879 the state of Texas appropriated \$12,500 to build 5 stations – 1 at Aransas Pass. The station had residences for a doctor and a boatman, plus a pest house for those quarantined. Dr. T.S. Burke served as doctor with Dr. Spohn and Dr. Hamilton providing relief. Men on duty at the station were paid \$10 a day. If a vessel was deemed "not clean" – it was thoroughly washed with salt water, then with carbolized water and fumigated with chlorine gas. They held the crew to see if they came down with fever – sometimes for as long as 21 days. In 1879 all vessels south of latitude 25° were quarantined.

Cyrus Farley remembered: "Doctor Skipper had a garden there. He raised some of the finest watermelons ever seen in this section. There seemed to be some peculiarity of the soil that made the melons thrive."

R.L. Mercer related: "Dr. Skipper was the last health officer at the station. Roy Court was boatman and operated the Mildred Collins that was destroyed in the 1919 storm." The doctor, boatman and their families went to Rockport during the storm. The Great Storm of 1919 swept the beach clean. All that was left were the salt cedars and sandy beach that stood 40 feet above normal tides. Public Health Service never replaced their buildings but auctioned off the seven acres in 1939.